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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 009401

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PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: MAYOR PREVIEWS (LIMITED) SCOPE OF QATIF'S  
MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

REF: A. RIYADH 9303

[1](#)B. RIYADH 8323

Classified by Consul General John Kincannon for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) In a meeting with the CG, Khalid Al-Dossari, Mayor of Qatif, said that the primary problem facing his municipality was haphazard development. Qatif, an oasis once composed of close-knit villages and date palm groves, is changing rapidly as the population grows and date farmers sell their groves for development; the villages are becoming linked by sprawl. Al-Dossari said that the municipality was nearing a solution in the form of a "master plan for integrated growth," developed over the past four years by a consultant working out of the planning department of the Eastern Province emirate. The plan, now in its final stage and projected to cover the next twenty years, will clarify zoning regulations and identify municipal projects such as roads and parks. As an example of a planned project, he showed his visitors an artist's rendition of large open area for the Shi'a celebration of Ashoura, surrounded by a mosque and three husseiniyyas, on which he said work was already underway.

[1](#)2. (C) Al-Dossari said that his portfolio as mayor included issuing building permits, building and maintaining roads, street cleaning and lighting, development of parks and markets, and environmental protection. On other issues, such as electricity and water/sewerage, the municipality had primarily a coordination role with the government agencies responsible for those portfolios, e.g. the Saudi Electric Company in the case of electricity. Other areas that fall typically fall under a mayor's jurisdiction in the U.S., such as law enforcement, education, health, and fire fighting, are completely outside his authority. "It's not easy here," Al-Dossari acknowledged, contrasting his limited powers with those of mayors in Egypt, where "they control almost everything in the municipality."

[1](#)3. (C) Asked by the CG what role the newly formed municipal councils would play in municipal affairs (ref A), Al-Dossari hesitated for a second. "I hope for good things," he continued, without too much enthusiasm. He said the councils would help his work "a little bit" because "there are things I can't do by myself." In particular, he noted that he does not always have the ability to get the money necessary for municipal projects from the Ministry of Finance in Riyadh. "They will help me in that," he said, explaining that the Ministry might be more willing to fund projects in Qatif if it knew the council, and therefore the people, were behind them. When the CG asked what role the council might have in guiding municipal decisions given the twenty-year master plan, Al-Dossari said that it might help in defining the priority of projects identified in the master plan. "The council members are sitting with the people outside so they know what the people want," Al Dossari continued. "They can tell me if we should pave this road first or improve the lighting in that area."

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: Al-Dossari's comments illustrate three factors that will limit the actual impact of the municipal councils: the limited jurisdiction of Saudi municipalities; the dependence of Saudi municipalities on Riyadh for funding and, in this case, on the emirate for centralized planning; and the likely reluctance of mayors to cede their limited powers (ref B). Nonetheless, as the mayor conceded, council members (or at least, in Qatif, the elected ones) are connected with the local community and can represent the community in determining priorities. We will watch the evolution of the Qatif council with interest, as we expect the elected members to be strong advocates both for community priorities and for an active voice for council members. End comment.

(APPROVED: KINCANNON)  
GFOELLER